

Richard Pipes and Seymour Weiss

The Record of 'Team B'

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 The New York Times _____
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The article by Bob Woodward and Walter Pincus on Vice President George Bush's tenure as director of Central Intelligence [Aug. 10] depicts Bush as someone who pays more attention to the "image" of politics than its substance. To argue this point, the authors make some casual and dubious statements about the so-called "Team-B" experiment in competitive analysis, which they describe as the "best-publicized episode in Bush's tenure at the CIA." To set the record straight about this "episode" in which both of us took part, and about Bush's role in it, a few comments are in order.

Woodward and Pincus quote an anonymous "former CIA official" to the effect that Team B was brought in for purposes which were "political" and "clearly anti-intellectual." (Oddly, such accusations are never leveled at liberal critics of the agency.) In fact, Team B was constituted in the fall of 1976 because those whose responsibility it is to monitor the performance of the intelligence community, the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, became genuinely disturbed by the contradiction between the agency's assessments of Soviet strategic intentions and the hard evidence which was made available to the board of Soviet strategic capabilities.

The agency proceeded on the assumption—a "mirror image" of U.S. policy—that Moscow regarded nuclear war as unwinnable and sought nothing more than strategic parity with the United States for purposes of deterrence. What disturbed the board was evidence that after having attained strategic parity around 1969, Moscow continued to build and deploy a whole array of offensive and defensive nuclear weapons not required for purposes of mere deterrence. An effort was made to persuade Bush's predecessor, William Colby, to allow an independent assessment of the materials at his agency's disposal, but as Woodward and Pincus correctly state, he refused.

Bush agreed to such an assessment. This action on his part hardly accords with the claim of Woodward and Pincus that while directing the CIA Bush went "with the flow." Quite the contrary. For one, the view the CIA upheld was favored by Congress and the academe. Second, any chief executive officer who invites an independent evaluation of his organization's performance risks criticism, which can redound to his discredit. It is indeed a sign of great civic courage that Bush took this risk.

For at stake were the most vital security interests of the United States. The conclusion of Team B—that the Soviet Union did not share the prevalent U.S. view of the utility of nuclear weapons but believed that they could be used to win a war—was immediately chal-

lenged by politicians and the media. Some in the CIA acknowledged the validity of much of the Team B analysis and many of its conclusions. Nevertheless, others in the agency, presumably believing that the CIA's reputation was at stake, through congressional committees accused Team B of being inspired by political motives. Legislators and the media, encouraged by the arms control lobby, engaged in personal attacks on Team B, whose membership included individuals of demonstrated expertise and integrity, among them Ambassador Paul Nitze.

Certainly if Bush were concerned primarily with his own and his agency's "image" he would not have given the green light to Team B in the first place and, having learned its conclusions, would have disowned them. Contrary to Woodward and Pincus, he did not "deem the experiment a mistake," although he regretted that its findings had been leaked. He accepted Team B's recommendations, as a result of which decision CIA estimates since that time have shown far greater realism in assessing Soviet intentions.

That this was the correct thing to do we now know from an authoritative Soviet source. On June 27, 1988, Izvestia cited the remark of V. V. Zagladin, the deputy director of the Central Committee's International Department, to the effect that in the past (presumably under Brezhnev) the Soviet Union had pursued inconsistent policies: "Rejecting nuclear war and struggling to prevent it, we, nevertheless, proceeded from the possibility of winning victory in it."

This long overdue admission, in our opinion, vindicates the Team B experiment and brings credit to the man who had made it possible. Finally, the Team B approach has in large measure become institutionalized. Subsequent CIA directors continued the process of inviting outside experts to review and provide advice on a range of intelligence estimates, to the net benefit of the nation. Thus, Bush can be credited with having made not only a courageous decision in supporting the Team B approach but an innovative one as well. All in all, a vastly different picture than that painted by Woodward and Pincus.

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